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AUTHOR Gray, Mary Jane
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ABSTRACT

Most reading methods courses do not provide many experiences in children's literature. Because teachers have experienced an elementary school setting in which free reading was discouraged, and because teachers teach as they were taught, this trend continues. The need for a second reading course at the undergraduate level is clearly apparent. Teaching in the content area of children's literature can be accomplished by the extension of the student teaching experience to a full day. Preservice students can work with small groups of children experiencing difficulty in reading, facilitating free reading and directed reading, and exposing the children to the listening experience. In addition, the development of trade book reading lists for content area lessons can be accomplished by student teachers. (KS)

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Mary Jane Gray
Loyola University
820 N. Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60611

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Children's Literature/Reading Methods II

A New Field Based Experience

Reading Methods: Relation to Children's Literature

Most reading methods courses do not provide many experiences in children's literature. This has been true in many cases in the student teaching experience as well. Maryanne Hall (1969) collected data to ascertain the extent and type of experiences with children's literature provided for student teachers by their "cooperating" teachers.

> Data indicated that in many of the classrooms surveyed the teachers selected to work with student teachers did not offer experiences which would lead a young teacher to strive towards the goal of teaching children to become lifelong readers of literature (p. 743).

The importance of exposure to literature has been emphasized over and over again as necessary to a complete reading program. It is just as essential to that program as the teaching of reading skills. Although many elementary teachers may recognize this, very few of them actually make literature an integral part of their reading program (Cullinan, 1972).

One reason which may account for lack of literature experiences in elementary classrooms may be a result of past practices. In the past many teachers tended to discourage children from reading books for pleasure during school hours. Surely this is a long outdated practice, and one which should never have been a practice at any time. Because many teachers today, however, experienced an elementary school setting in which free reading was discouraged, and because many teachers teach as they were taught, this practice still continues in some of our schools.

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Sebesta and Iverson (1975) state, "In the elementary school emphasis on children's literature is needed equal to the emphasis on basic reading instruction."

A number of studies (Cullinan, 1972) have been conducted which illustrate the positive effect on a child's use of language and reading as a result of exposure to literature. The findings are as follows:

> Teacher's reading aloud daily is associated with a measurable increase in children's language ability.
> A special program in literature using daily oral reading has a significant effect on children's reading ability.
> Competence in composition and increasing mastery over syntax develops from a continuing exposure to literature of superior quality.
> Children are able to read beyond their measured reading level when they encounter high interest material (p. 1034).

At Loyola there are a number of goals which the instructors of children's literature would like to see achieved. One of these is for future teachers to become familiar with a broad range of children's literature as this is essential for an effective elementary teacher. These individuals must also gain an understanding of how this literature is an integral part of a total reading program and how it can be used effectively in supplementing instruction in content areas. Most important of all, teachers should strive to help children develop an interest in reading as well as a desire to read.

Second Reading Course

It has been evident for some time that a second reading course is necessary at the undergraduate level. Students have requested additional work in this area -- especially in regard to diagnosing reading problems and making provision for them in the classroom. A factor not generally given sufficient consideration even by practicing teachers is the role

which interests play in helping to alleviate reading problems. Most teachers devote extra time to teaching reading skills to children experiencing difficulty in reading. Fry (1975) expressed very clearly what would be more effective in alleviating reading problems.

> If you have students with poor motivation, make the reading easy for them until either their reading ability improves or their motivation for reading something increases (p. 847).

Children's literature has a great contribution to make in accomplishing the above.

One reading methods course does not provide adequate preparation in another area: teaching reading in the various content areas. Once again, both preservice and inservice teachers can use all the help they can get to do this effectively. One quote helps to illustrate why this is true. Johnson and Vardian (1973) stated, "A teacher must realize that if he has an average class at least half the children may have some difficulty reading the textbooks (p. 4)."

One of the content areas which has seemed to receive insufficient emphasis in our present methods block is social studies. This situation would be eased or perhaps eliminated if the children's literature/reading methods II experience is provided.

Allan Wheeler (1971) has stressed the importance of reading in the social studies very well.

> Limiting students to textbooks which emphasize skills first and reading second defeats the purpose of education. Trade books are the material we ultimately want students to enjoy. Provision of a time and place for reading should not be excluded from instruction in the content areas.
>
> . . .Good trade books breathe life into people and places. . . Factual material will never be able to present the joys, sorrows, and problems of other times and people. . .

> The quality of writing and the beauty of the illustrations in good trade books will recreate the charm and lifestyle of other times and places. From such quality literature children can build a mental pool of experiences lost to them through purely factual reading materials (pp. 166-170).

Combined Field Experience

The present student teaching experience extends over a semester, five mornings a week. A whole day experience will be provided with the addition of these two courses. Teacher candidates, children, classroom teachers and books will all come together in the field setting. A twenty minute period will be devoted to free reading by students and teachers. Preservice students will work with small groups of children who are experiencing difficulty in reading content area texts. It will be the responsibility of the preservice students to locate information for those children which is in line with the topics being studied, but which is of interest to each child and which is easy enough for him to read. Development of trade book reading lists for content area lessons and use of these books with individuals or small groups of children will be an important component of this field based experience. A large supply of trade books will be made available which can supplement textbooks or in many cases supplant them. During the last twenty minutes of each afternoon, the preservice students will read to the children so that all may be exposed to some of the wealth in children's literature.

It would seem the following benefits would accrue to individuals participating in the program.

A) For teacher candidates -- It should help to reinforce knowledge of the fact that children's reading skills improve not only through direct instruction in those skills, but also through a planned literature which provides time for personal and shared reading. These experiences should make them more effective teachers in the content areas.

B) For elementary children -- It should provide an opportunity for them to improve their reading skills while learning to appreciate and enjoy literature. It also may provide the first opportunity for some of them to experience success in reading in the content areas.

C) For the college instructor -- It should provide an opportunity to work with students not only in the classroom, but in the field as well. It would also help to ensure that he keep up with the latest in children's books and to note firsthand children's reactions to them.

D) For the classroom teacher -- It would be a good inservice program. He would be able to observe firsthand how trade books can effectively supplement the content areas and also come to recognize that it is a manageable system -- one which would not consume too much preparation time on his part. More important would be the fact that the children in the classroom would be receiving the additional help many of them need to experience success.

Through the combined efforts of cooperating teachers, preservice teachers, and college instructors; it would be possible to provide a much better reading environment for elementary children and as a result of this to assist in the development of lifelong readers.

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